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NAIROBI FOR LARRY ANDRE AND JAMES STEWART
DEPT PLEASE PASS TO AMBASSADOR PETER CHAVEAS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [ABLD](#) [AGMT](#) [CVIS](#) [SL](#)

SUBJECT: Embassy Freetown Dedicates New Embassy Compound November
[11](#)16.

[1](#)1. On November 16, Embassy Freetown officially dedicated the New Embassy Compound. OBO Director General Charles E. Williams and Sierra Leone Vice President Solomon E. Berewa (representing President Kabbah who was out of the country) and the Ambassador participated in the outdoor ceremony, unveiled the plaque and cut the ribbon, in front of a high-level invited audience. The Director of the Office of West African Affairs Philip Carter represented the Bureau of African Affairs. Embassy Freetown will open for business on the new compound on December 4.

[1](#)2. The Embassy is located on a spectacular site in the shadow of Leicester Peak and commands breathtaking views of Freetown and the Atlantic Ocean. It is high enough above sea level to enjoy its own micro climate. During the dedication ceremony, OBO Director General Charles E. Williams commented on the impressive location and recalled his first visit to Freetown when he toured the proposed site by helicopter. He later returned to participate in the 2004 groundbreaking ceremony with President Kabbah and Ambassador Peter Chaveas. He expressed his pleasure at being able to return to Sierra Leone for a third time to participate in the dedication.

[1](#)3. Sierra Leone Vice President Solomon E. Berewa lauded the opening of the \$60 million embassy compound and said it reflected a significant investment of confidence by the United States in the secure future of Sierra Leone, which emerged from a brutal civil war in 2002. He commented on the strong ties Sierra Leone enjoys with the United States and expressed appreciation for U.S. contributions to Sierra Leone's development. Amid audience applause, he particularly welcomed the new consular facility which will enable Sierra Leoneans to apply for visas in Freetown, rather than traveling to Conakry, as they have done for the past ten years. (Note: The Consular Section will open for non-immigrant visa services in early 2007. End Note).

[1](#)4. The New Embassy Compound has spawned a building boom in the neighborhood that has grown up alongside the construction of the NEC since 2004. Even the Foreign Ministry plans to build nearby. While the structure is substantially completed, the Ambassador noted in his address that significant projects remain, including finding a sustainable water supply, restoring the scarred adjacent hillside, and the need for the Government of Sierra Leone to honor its lease commitment to improve the road passing in front. Above all, he added, despite the area building boom, there must be limits to Freetown's expansion to help preserve the Western Area forest reserve.

[1](#)5. Almost all invitees showed up for the noontime dedication, a partial reflection of the eagerness to be among the first to tour the new U.S. Embassy. Usually, one can only anticipate a fifty percent turnout to events in Sierra Leone. The approximately 250 guests included government ministers, the Chief Justice and senior judiciary, high ranking civil servants, members of civil society and prominent religious leaders. The Milton Margai School for the Blind Choir, who had performed at the groundbreaking, returned to sing the

U.S. and Sierra Leone national anthems and later performed in the atrium during the reception. The Sierra Leone Armed Forces Band also played for the event.

¶6. After the dedication, invited guests toured the chancery public areas and viewed the extensive artwork. They admired the building, easily the most impressive and modern structure in Sierra Leone. Embassy employees are eager to move and have expressed pride that they will be working in the new structure, even though many will face longer daily commutes. Nevertheless, as the Ambassador noted, we will leave behind our location in the heart of Freetown, in the shadow of Sierra Leone's historic centuries-old Cotton Tree with nostalgia, after 40 years.

¶7. The dedication received considerable positive press coverage. Eight newspapers carried front page coverage with photos. Headlines included: "US Embassy Dedicates New Building"; "After 40 years, US Embassy relocated to Leicester Peak"; "US Visas to be issued in Freetown," and "\$60 million Embassy opened". All the local radio stations carried the Embassy press release in their coverage and six stations broadcast speech excerpts. The BBC Africa service also reported on the event, highlighting the anticipated return of visa services. The local private TV station also carried the story with several clips of the event. A pre-recorded interview with the Ambassador on UN radio aired on Sunday November 19 and mentioned the dedication and anticipated resumption of non-immigrant visa services.

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